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Standard Test Method for Laboratory Determination of Water (Moisture) Content of Soil and Rock by Mass¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D 2216; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ε) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope *

1.1 This test method covers the laboratory determination of the water (moisture) content by mass of soil, rock, and similar materials where the reduction in mass by drying is due to loss of water except as noted in 1.4, 1.5, and 1.7. For simplicity, the word “material” hereinafter also refers to either soil or rock, whichever is most applicable.

1.2 Some disciplines, such as soil science, need to determine water content on the basis of volume. Such determinations are beyond the scope of this test method.

1.3 The water content of a material is defined in 3.2.1.

1.4 The term “solid material” as used in geotechnical engineering is typically assumed to mean naturally occurring mineral particles of soil and rock that are not readily soluble in water. Therefore, the water content of materials containing extraneous matter (such as cement, and the like) may require special treatment or a qualified definition of water content. In addition, some organic materials may be decomposed by oven drying at the standard drying temperature for this method (110°C). Materials containing gypsum (calcium sulfate dihydrate or other compounds having significant amounts of hydrated water) may present a special problem as this material slowly dehydrates at the standard drying temperature (110°C) and at very low relative humidities, forming a compound (calcium sulfate hemihydrate) which is not normally present in natural materials except in some desert soils. In order to reduce the degree of dehydration of gypsum in those materials containing gypsum, or to reduce decomposition in highly organic soils, it may be desirable to dry these materials at 60°C or in a desiccator at room temperature. Thus, when a drying temperature is used which is different from the standard drying temperature as defined by this test method, the resulting water content may be different from standard water content determined at the standard drying temperature.

NOTE 1—Test Methods D 2974 provides an alternate procedure for determining water content of peat materials.

1.5 Materials containing water with substantial amounts of soluble solids (such as salt in the case of marine sediments) when tested by this method will give a mass of solids which includes the previously soluble solids. These materials require special treatment to remove or account for the presence of precipitated solids in the dry mass of the specimen, or a qualified definition of water content must be used. For example, see Noorany² regarding information on marine soils.

1.6 This test method requires several hours for proper drying of the water content specimen. Test Method D 4643 provides for drying of the test specimen in a microwave oven which is a shorter process. Also see Gilbert³ for details on the background of this test method.

1.7 This standard requires the drying of material in an oven at high temperatures. If the material being dried is contaminated with certain chemicals, health and safety hazards can exist. Therefore, this standard should not be used in determining the water content of contaminated soils unless adequate health and safety precautions are taken.

1.8 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:

- D 653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids⁴
- D 2974 Test Methods for Moisture, Ash, and Organic Matter of Peat and Other Organic Soils⁴
- D 4220 Practice for Preserving and Transporting Soil Samples⁴
- D 4318 Test Method for Liquid Limit, Plastic Limit, and Plasticity Index of Soils⁴
- D 4643 Test Method for Determination of Water (Moisture)

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D-18 on Soil and Rock and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D18.03 on Texture, Plasticity and Density Characteristics of Soils.

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² Noorany, I., “Phase Relations in Marine Soils”, Journal of Geotechnical Engineering, ASCE, Vol. 110, No. 4, April 1984, pp. 539–543.

³ Gilbert, P.A., “Computer Controlled Microwave Oven System for Rapid Water Content Determination”, Tech. Report GL-88-21, Department of the Army, Waterways Experiment Station, Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg, MS, November 1988.

⁴ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 04.08.

- Content of Soil by the Microwave Oven Method⁴
 D 4753 Specification for Evaluating, Selecting, and Specifying Balances and Scales for Use in Soil and Rock Testing⁴
 D 6026 Guide for Using Significant Digits in Calculating and Reporting Geotechnical Test Data⁵
 E 145 Specification for Gravity-Convection And Forced-Ventilation Ovens⁶

3. Terminology

3.1 Refer to Terminology D 653 for standard definitions of terms.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *water content (of a material)*—the ratio expressed as a percent of the mass of “pore” or “free” water in a given mass of material to the mass of the solid material. A standard temperature of $110^{\circ} \pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$ is used to determine these masses.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 A test specimen is dried in an oven at a temperature of $110^{\circ} \pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$ to a constant mass. The loss of mass due to drying is considered to be water. The water content is calculated using the mass of water and the mass of the dry specimen.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 For many materials, the water content is one of the most significant index properties used in establishing a correlation between soil behavior and its index properties.

5.2 The water content of a material is used in expressing the phase relationships of air, water, and solids in a given volume of material.

5.3 In fine-grained (cohesive) soils, the consistency of a given soil type depends on its water content. The water content of a soil, along with its liquid and plastic limits as determined by Test Method D 4318, is used to express its relative consistency or liquidity index.

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Drying Oven*, thermostatically-controlled, preferably of the forced-draft type, meeting the requirements of Specification E 145 and capable of maintaining a uniform temperature of $110 \pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$ throughout the drying chamber.

6.2 *Balances*—All balances must meet the requirements of Specification D 4753 and this section. A Class GP1 balance of 0.01g readability is required for specimens having a mass of up to 200 g (excluding mass of specimen container) and a Class GP2 balance of 0.1g readability is required for specimens having a mass over 200 g. However, the balance used may be controlled by the number of significant digits needed (see 8.2.1 and 12.1.2).

6.3 *Specimen Containers*—Suitable containers made of material resistant to corrosion and change in mass upon repeated heating, cooling, exposure to materials of varying pH, and cleaning. Unless a desiccator is used, containers with close-fitting lids shall be used for testing specimens having a mass of

less than about 200 g; while for specimens having a mass greater than about 200 g, containers without lids may be used (see Note 7). One container is needed for each water content determination.

NOTE 2—The purpose of close-fitting lids is to prevent loss of moisture from specimens before initial mass determination and to prevent absorption of moisture from the atmosphere following drying and before final mass determination.

6.4 *Desiccator*—A desiccator cabinet or large desiccator jar of suitable size containing silica gel or anhydrous calcium sulfate. It is preferable to use a desiccant which changes color to indicate it needs reconstitution. See 10.5.

NOTE 3—Anhydrous calcium sulfate is sold under the trade name Drierite.

6.5 *Container Handling Apparatus*, gloves, tongs, or suitable holder for moving and handling hot containers after drying.

6.6 *Miscellaneous*, knives, spatulas, scoops, quartering cloth, sample splitters, etc, as required.

7. Samples

7.1 Samples shall be preserved and transported in accordance with Practice 4220 Groups B, C, or D soils. Keep the samples that are stored prior to testing in noncorrodible airtight containers at a temperature between approximately 3 and 30°C and in an area that prevents direct contact with sunlight. Disturbed samples in jars or other containers shall be stored in such a way as to prevent or minimize moisture condensation on the insides of the containers.

7.2 The water content determination should be done as soon as practicable after sampling, especially if potentially corrodible containers (such as thin-walled steel tubes, paint cans, etc.) or plastic sample bags are used.

8. Test Specimen

8.1 For water contents being determined in conjunction with another ASTM method, the specimen mass requirement stated in that method shall be used if one is provided. If no minimum specimen mass is provided in that method then the values given below shall apply. See Howard⁷ for background data for the values listed.

8.2 The minimum mass of moist material selected to be representative of the total sample shall be in accordance with the following:

Maximum particle size (100 % passing)	Standard Sieve Size	Recommended minimum mass of moist test specimen for water content reported to $\pm 0.1\%$	Recommended minimum mass of moist test specimen for water content reported to $\pm 1\%$
2 mm or less	No. 10	20 g	20 g ^A
4.75 mm	No. 4	100 g	20 g ^A
9.5 mm	3/8-in.	500 g	50 g
19.0 mm	3/4-in.	2.5 kg	250 g
37.5 mm	1 1/2 in.	10 kg	1 kg

⁵ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 04.09.

⁶ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 14.02.

⁷ Howard, A. K., “Minimum Test Specimen Mass for Moisture Content Determination”, *Geotechnical Testing Journal*, A.S.T.M., Vol. 12, No. 1, March 1989, pp. 39-44.

75.0 mm

3-in.

50 kg

5 kg

^aTo be representative not less than 20 g shall be used.

8.2.1 The minimum mass used may have to be increased to obtain the needed significant digits for the mass of water when reporting water contents to the nearest 0.1 % or as indicated in 12.1.2.

8.3 Using a test specimen smaller than the minimum indicated in 8.2 requires discretion, though it may be adequate for the purposes of the test. Any specimen used not meeting these requirements shall be noted on the test data forms or test data sheets.

8.4 When working with a small (less than 200g) specimen containing a relatively large gravel particle, it is appropriate not to include this particle in the test specimen. However, any discarded material shall be described and noted on the test data forms or test data sheets.

8.5 For those samples consisting entirely of intact rock, the minimum specimen mass shall be 500 g. Representative portions of the sample may be broken into smaller particles, depending on the sample's size, the container and balance being used and to facilitate drying to constant mass, see 10.4. Specimen sizes as small as 200 g may be tested if water contents of only two significant digits are acceptable.

9. Test Specimen Selection

9.1 When the test specimen is a portion of a larger amount of material, the specimen must be selected to be representative of the water condition of the entire amount of material. The manner in which the test specimen is selected depends on the purpose and application of the test, type of material being tested, the water condition, and the type of sample (from another test, bag, block, and the likes.)

9.2 For disturbed samples such as trimmings, bag samples, and the like, obtain the test specimen by one of the following methods (listed in order of preference):

9.2.1 If the material is such that it can be manipulated and handled without significant moisture loss and segregation, the material should be mixed thoroughly and then select a representative portion using a scoop of a size that no more than a few scoops are required to obtain the proper size of specimen defined in 8.2.

9.2.2 If the material is such that it cannot be thoroughly mixed or mixed and sampled by a scoop, form a stockpile of the material, mixing as much as possible. Take at least five portions of material at random locations using a sampling tube, shovel, scoop, trowel, or similar device appropriate to the maximum particle size present in the material. Combine all the portions for the test specimen.

9.2.3 If the material or conditions are such that a stockpile cannot be formed, take as many portions of the material as practical, using random locations that will best represent the moisture condition. Combine all the portions for the test specimen.

9.3 Intact samples such as block, tube, split barrel, and the like, obtain the test specimen by one of the following methods depending on the purpose and potential use of the sample.

9.3.1 Using a knife, wire saw, or other sharp cutting device, trim the outside portion of the sample a sufficient distance to see if the material is layered and to remove material that

appears more dry or more wet than the main portion of the sample. If the existence of layering is questionable, slice the sample in half. If the material is layered, see 9.3.3.

9.3.2 If the material is not layered, obtain the specimen meeting the mass requirements in 8.2 by: (1) taking all or one-half of the interval being tested; (2) trimming a representative slice from the interval being tested; or (3) trimming the exposed surface of one-half or from the interval being tested.

NOTE 4—Migration of moisture in some cohesionless soils may require that the full section be sampled.

9.3.3 If a layered material (or more than one material type is encountered), select an average specimen, or individual specimens, or both. Specimens must be properly identified as to location, or what they represent, and appropriate remarks entered on the test data forms or test data sheets.

10. Procedure

10.1 Determine and record the mass of the clean and dry specimen container (and its lid, if used).

10.2 Select representative test specimens in accordance with Section 9.

10.3 Place the moist test specimen in the container and, if used, set the lid securely in position. Determine the mass of the container and moist material using a balance (see 6.2) selected on the basis of the specimen mass. Record this value.

NOTE 5—To prevent mixing of specimens and yielding of incorrect results, all containers, and lids if used, should be numbered and the container numbers shall be recorded on the laboratory data sheets. The lid numbers should match the container numbers to eliminate confusion.

NOTE 6—To assist in the oven-drying of large test specimens, they should be placed in containers having a large surface area (such as pans) and the material broken up into smaller aggregations.

10.4 Remove the lid (if used) and place the container with moist material in the drying oven. Dry the material to a constant mass. Maintain the drying oven at $110 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$ unless otherwise specified (see 1.4). The time required to obtain constant mass will vary depending on the type of material, size of specimen, oven type and capacity, and other factors. The influence of these factors generally can be established by good judgment, and experience with the materials being tested and the apparatus being used.

NOTE 7—In most cases, drying a test specimen overnight (about 12 to 16 h) is sufficient. In cases where there is doubt concerning the adequacy of drying, drying should be continued until the change in mass after two successive periods (greater than 1 h) of drying is an insignificant amount (less than about 0.1 %). Specimens of sand may often be dried to constant mass in a period of about 4 h, when a forced-draft oven is used.

NOTE 8—Since some dry materials may absorb moisture from moist specimens, dried specimens should be removed before placing moist specimens in the same oven. However, this would not be applicable if the previously dried specimens will remain in the drying oven for an additional time period of about 16 h.

10.5 After the material has dried to constant mass remove the container from the oven (and replace the lid if used). Allow the material and container to cool to room temperature or until the container can be handled comfortably with bare hands and the operation of the balance will not be affected by convection currents and/or its being heated. Determine the mass of the container and oven-dried material using the same type/capacity

balance used in 10.3. Record this value. Tight fitting lids shall be used if it appears that the specimen is absorbing moisture from the air prior to determination of its dry mass.

NOTE 9—Cooling in a desiccator is acceptable in place of tight fitting lids since it greatly reduces absorption of moisture from the atmosphere during cooling especially for containers without tight fitting lids.

11. Calculation

11.1 Calculate the water content of the material as follows:

$$w = [(M_{cws} - M_{cs}) / (M_{cs} - M_c)] \times 100 = \frac{M_w}{M_s} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

where:

- w = water content, %,
- M_{cws} = mass of container and wet specimen, g,
- M_{cs} = mass of container and oven dry specimen, g,
- M_c = mass of container, g,
- M_w = mass of water ($M_w = M_{cws} - M_{cs}$), g, and
- M_s = mass of solid particles ($M_s = M_{cs} - M_c$), g.

12. Report

12.1 Test data forms or test data sheets shall include the following:

12.1.1 Identification of the sample (material) being tested, such as boring number, sample number, test number, container number etc.

12.1.2 Water content of the specimen to the nearest 1 % or 0.1 %, as appropriate based on the minimum sample used. If this method is used in concert with another method, the water content of the specimen should be reported to the value required by the test method for which the water content is being determined. Refer to Guide D 6026 for guidance concerning significant digits, especially if the value obtained from this test method is to be used to calculate other relationships such as unit weight or density. For instance, if it is desired to express dry unit weight to the nearest 0.1 lbf/ft³ (0.02 kN/m³), it may be necessary to use a balance with a greater readability or use a larger specimen mass to obtain the required significant digits the mass of water so that the water content can be determined to the required significant digits. Also, the significant digits in Guide D 6026 may need to be increased when calculating phase relationships requiring four significant digits.

12.1.3 Indicate if test specimen had a mass less than the minimum indicated in 8.2.

12.1.4 Indicate if test specimen contained more than one material type (layered, etc.).

12.1.5 Indicate the temperature of drying if different from 110 ± 5°C.

12.1.6 Indicate if any material (size and amount) was excluded from the test specimen.

12.2 When reporting water content in tables, figures, etc., any data not meeting the requirements of this test method shall be noted, such as not meeting the mass, balance, or temperature requirements or a portion of the material is excluded from the test specimen.

13. Precision and Bias

13.1 *Statement on Bias*—There is no accepted reference value for this test method; therefore, bias cannot be determined.

13.2 *Statements on Precision*:

13.2.1 *Single-Operator Precision (Repeatability)*—The single-operator coefficient of variation has been found to be 2.7 percent. Therefore, results of two properly conducted tests by the same operator with the same equipment should not be considered suspect unless they differ by more than 7.8 percent of their mean.⁸

13.2.2 *Multilaboratory Precision (Reproducibility)*⁹—The multilaboratory coefficient of variation has been found to be 5.0 percent. Therefore, results of two properly conducted tests by different operators using different equipment should not be considered suspect unless they differ by more than 14.0 percent of their mean.

14. Keywords

14.1 consistency; index property; laboratory; moisture analysis; moisture content; soil aggregate; water content

⁸ These numbers represent the (1s) and (d2s) limits as described in Practice C 670.

⁹ These numbers represent the (1s %) and (d2s %) limits as described in Practice C 670.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Committee D-18 has identified the location of selected changes to this standard since the last issue. (D 2216-92) that may impact the use of this standard.

- (1) Title was changed to emphasize that mass is the basis for the standard.
- (2) Section 1.1 was revised to clarify “similar materials”.
- (3) New 1.2 was added to explain a limitation in scope. The other sections were renumbered as appropriate.
- (4) An information reference was included in 1.5.
- (5) An information reference was included in 1.6

- (6) A new ASTM referenced document was included in 2.1.
- (7) New Footnotes 2, 3, and 5 were added and identified. Other footnotes were renumbered where necessary for sequential identification.
- (8) Information concerning balances was added in 6.2
- (9) Section 6.3 was revised to clarify the use of close-fitting lids, and a reference to Note 8 was added.

(10) In 6.4, "anhydrous calcium phosphate" was changed to "anhydrous calcium sulfate" to correct an error and to agree with Note 3.

(11) A typo in 8.1 was corrected from "before" to "below" and a footnoted reference was added for information.

(12) A portion of 8.2 was deleted for clarity.

(13) A new 8.2.1 was added to clarify minimum mass requirements.

(14) Sections 8.3, 8.4, 9.3.3, and 12.1 were changed to substitute "test data form/sheet" for "report".

(15) Footnote seven was identified.

(16) Section 9.2.1 was revised to improve clarity and intent.

(17) The word "possible" was changed to "practical" in 9.2.3.

(18) Section 9.3.1 and 9.3.2 were revised to improve clarity and for practicality.

(19) A reference to Guide D 6026 was added in 12.1.2.

(20) Footnotes 8 and 9 were added to 13.2.1 and 13.2.2, respectively. These were inadvertently omitted from the 1992 version. These explanations provide clarity and information to the user.

(21) A Summary of Changes was added to reflect D-18's policy.

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